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Senate

The Senate met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. LEAHY.)

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

O God, in whose life we find life, open the hearts of our lawmakers to the whispers of Your Spirit. Make them productive, accomplishing Your purposes on Earth, even as Your providence guides them. Lord, redeem their failures, reward their diligence, and validate their faith. Crown their labors today with Heaven's approbation, strengthening them to rise above all that is common to do the uncommon.

We pray in Your holy Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The President pro tempore led the Pledge of Allegiance as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader is recognized.

MINIMUM WAGE FAIRNESS ACT— MOTION TO PROCEED

Mr. REID. I now move to proceed to Calendar No. 354.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will report the motion.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

Motion to proceed to Calendar No. 354, S. 2223, a bill to provide for an increase in the Federal minimum wage and to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to extend increased expensing limitations and the treatment of certain real property as section 179 property.

SCHEDULE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, following my remarks and those of the Repub-

lican leader, the Senate will be in a period of morning business until 11 o'clock this morning, with the majority controlling the first half and the Republicans controlling the final half. At 11 a.m. there will be six cloture votes on six U.S. district court nominations. Following the votes, the Senate will recess until 2:15 to allow for our weekly caucus meetings.

MEASURE PLACED ON THE CALENDAR—S. 2262

I am told that S. 2262 is due for its second reading.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will read the bill by title for the second time.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 2262) to promote energy savings in residential buildings and industry, and for other purposes.

Mr. REID. I object to any further proceedings with respect to this bill.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Objection is heard. The bill will be placed on the calendar.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, this week the Senate will begin consideration of an increase in the Federal minimum wage.

Over the next few days Members of this body will come to the floor and make their case for or against increasing the minimum wage. Most of the statements we will hear today will be in favor of it because the Republicans are not anxious to come here and speak against raising the minimum wage. They will be very silent most of the time, and they will not talk much about an increase in the minimum wage, which is so vitally important to our country.

The American people will be inundated with figures and facts regarding the economic impact of an increase to \$10.10. Why was that number chosen? It was chosen because at that number—\$10.10 for 40 hours—a person is no longer in poverty.

As supporters of this legislation, Senate Democrats have ample evidence to back our position that an increase in

the Federal minimum wage is good for America. A recent study from the Economic Policy Institute indicates that increasing the minimum wage and tying it to inflation would raise wages for 28 million American workers. That is about 10 percent of the American people. Contrary to what Republicans would have us believe, these 28 million Americans aren't just high school kids looking to make a few bucks after school. That same analysis reported that the median age of minimum wage workers is 35 years old, proving that these employees are grown men and women, most of them with families. If we needed any more reason to pass this important legislation, the most recent polling data reveals that about 75 percent of Americans back an increase in the minimum wage.

So the evidence supporting an increase in the minimum wage is ample, and it is there for all of us to see. However, the real issue transcends political polls and studies. The heart of the minimum wage debate is not found in statistics but, rather, in a question we should ask ourselves: What kind of a country do we aspire to be?

This Nation is home to the greatest economy on Earth. Even as we continue to recover from the great recession, there is no question that we are the richest country on the planet. Can anyone in this Chamber doubt that our economy has the capability of providing livable wages to American workers? The fact that in America there are full-time working mothers and fathers who must juggle two to three jobs just to provide food and shelter for their children is unconscionable.

Before any sulking billionaire comes forward as upset and pens an op-ed in some newspaper calling me a collectivist, as they have done, let me be clear: This is a question of fairness. Do

● This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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we believe it is fair that fellow Americans who work full time be paid less than a livable wage? I hope not. Or do we value all American workers and reward them with, at the very least, a baseline wage that enables them to provide for their families?

There was a recent story in Nevada about a young man named Dalven who works at McDonald's. He works hard, but his wages are so low he is forced to get another job. Working two jobs, what is this young man going to do? Is he going to go to college? Of course not. Is he going to go to trade school? Of course not. He is too busy working. What is going to happen to him to better his life?

Just a few months ago an incredibly successful businessman visited Capitol Hill. He said he put himself through college attending Harvard, and he did that being paid \$2 an hour, which was the minimum wage at the time. He now is an elderly, very successful businessman. He worked full-time over the course of the year and was able to pay Harvard's tuition. The tuition at that time was \$2,400 a year—which was a lot—at one of America's premier schools. Jim even claims he had money left over after paying his college fees. Jim's daughter is now preparing to enroll at Harvard. If she were to be employed at today's minimum wage, she would need to work full time for 4 years to afford even one year of tuition and room and board at Harvard. The young man at McDonald's I just talked about, Dalven, could never dream of putting himself through Harvard or UNLV or any other place because he is working two jobs and cannot do it.

Simply put, it is not fair that working families are being stripped of the American dream. That is what Dalven has, as does everybody else, and as did the Presiding Officer and as did I—the dream to better oneself, to maybe even be better than what their family was able to be.

So, again, put simply, is it fair that working men and women are being stripped of the American dream because we refuse to pay them a livable wage? They are working hard. That is why this legislation before us is so critical.

An increase in the minimum wage obviously won't make a millionaire of anyone, but it will ensure that each full time working American receives a wage they can live on and that will give them a fighting chance to get ahead in the economy. Every hard-working American should have the opportunity to put a roof over their head and that of their family, and every full-time employee should have a fair shot at the American dream.

So I invite my Republican colleagues to consider what is fair for their constituents and to work with us to increase the Federal minimum wage, as 75 percent of the American people think we should do. They should join in giving every American a fair shot to provide for their families.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BOOKER). The Republican leader is recognized.

CONDOLENCES TO TORNADO VICTIMS

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I wish to take a moment to offer condolences to those affected by this week's storms. Tornadoes struck a terrible blow in several towns, and we are thinking today of all of those who were killed and injured and their friends and families as well.

JOBS

Mr. President, the American people want Congress to focus on one thing above all else: Jobs. Jobs. One would think the Democrats who control the Senate would want to help us advance bipartisan ideas to boost job creation. One would think they would actually work with us to address the concerns and anxieties of our constituents. But, instead, Senate Democrats are pushing legislation this week that would actually cost—not create but actually cost—up to a million American jobs.

This is completely tone deaf. Their bill would cost up to 17,000 jobs in Kentucky alone. Apparently, this is what Senate Democrats have made their top priority. It is not much of a surprise, though. As I have said many times, Washington Democrats often seem to hurt the very people they claim to be fighting for. When it comes to so many of their proposals, Washington Democrats appear to prioritize the desires of the far left over the needs of the middle class. Let's be honest. The interests of the far left and the interests of the middle class seem to be in fierce opposition these days.

Take the Keystone Pipeline, for example. The Obama administration recently announced yet another punt on this critical jobs project—one that would lead to the creation of thousands—literally thousands—of good jobs. Why? Because of pressure from the far left. One union leader called the administration's decision “a cold, hard slap in the face for hard-working Americans.” Another labor leader, whose union endorsed the President twice, put it this way: “No one seriously believes that the administration's nearly-dark-of-night announcement . . . was anything but politically motivated. It represented,” he said, “another low blow to the working men and women of our country for whom the Keystone XL Pipeline is a lifeline to good jobs and to energy security. . . .”

Here is a project the government has been studying for 5 or 6 years now. For 5 or 6 years they have been studying this project.

Americans have learned that building Keystone would produce significant economic benefit for our country, that it would lower energy prices, and that it would lead to the creation of thousands of jobs at a time when we need them more than ever. President Obama's own administration has concluded that approving Keystone would not significantly impact net carbon

emissions anyway. Approving the project wouldn't have an adverse impact on carbon emissions.

So one would think Washington Democrats would join the large majority of Americans who say Keystone is a good deal for our country. One would think they would jump at the chance to advance sound policy that has already been thoroughly vetted. But, then, we would be missing the point because Democrats' opposition to Keystone isn't really about policy at all. They basically surrendered the policy argument a long time ago. That is not really what this is about for them. Remember: This is the same party that effectively conceded its agenda for the rest of this year was drafted by campaign staffers. The whole agenda for the rest of the year was drafted by campaign staffers. They said that.

So for them this is more about politics and symbolism, and the far left has apparently decided that killing Keystone is the symbolic scalp they want. In fact, they are demanding it. Washington Democrats seem perfectly willing to go along.

Of course, the big loser in all of this is the American middle class—the moms and dads and sisters and brothers whose primary concern is paying the bills and putting food on the table. These are the people who have had it worse in the Obama economy—the very people Washington Democrats should be doing literally everything to help.

What I am saying to my colleagues today is it is not too late. They can still work with Republicans to create more opportunity and to help us rebuild the middle class, but to do so they need to abandon the left and start focusing on the middle class for a change. If they are ready to get serious about job creation, then there are some easy ways to demonstrate that to the American people. For starters, they can stop pushing legislation that would cut rather than create jobs, and they can stop blocking projects such as Keystone—a project that almost everyone knows will create jobs. Americans want jobs, not symbolism. So start working with us to give the American people the kind of pro-jobs policies they want and deserve.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, there will now be a period of morning business until 11 a.m., with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each, with the time equally divided between the two leaders or their designees, with the majority controlling the first half and the Republicans controlling the final half.

Mr. MCCONNELL. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.